

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 16, 2005

MATTOLE RIVER ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES PHASE II

File No. 05-026

Project Manager: Su Corbaley

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Consideration and possible authorization to disburse up to \$433,000 to the Mattole Restoration Council to implement phase II of Mattole River watershed enhancement activities.

LOCATION: Lost Coast region of Northern Mendocino County and Southern Humboldt County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Integrated Marine and Coastal Resources Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: CEQA Documentation

Exhibit 3: Historic Coho and Chinook Ranges within the Watershed

Exhibit 4: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31220 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed four hundred thirty-three thousand dollars (\$433,000) to the Mattole Restoration Council, Inc. (“MRC”), a nonprofit organization, to implement phase II of Mattole River watershed enhancement activities, including road restoration (decommissioning), environmental review and permitting for the Watershed Management Plan, water conservation outreach to identify conservation opportunities, road sediment-load inventories, invasive plant removal and management, and fisheries monitoring for spawning and juvenile populations, in the Mattole River watershed to improve anadromous salmonid habitat and coastal resources. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the MRC shall submit for review and approval by the Executive Officer a work program, schedule, budget, and the names of any

MATTOLE RIVER ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES - PHASE II

contractors to be used for the activities under this authorization, and provide evidence that all permits necessary to this project have been issued.

2. Conservancy funding shall be acknowledged in signage or other documentation appropriate to the project, as approved by the Executive Officer of the Conservancy.
3. With respect to work funded by the Conservancy and constituting an improvement or development, an agreement or agreements to protect public interest shall be entered into and recorded in Humboldt County, consistent with Public Resources Code Section 31116(c).
4. With respect to work funded by the Conservancy and requiring access to privately-owned land, an agreement or agreements to allow access to the grantee to perform the work shall be entered into.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and criteria of Chapter 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31220) regarding protection of integrated coastal and marine resources.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The Conservancy has reviewed the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration (attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2) adopted by the California Department of Fish and Game on June 19, 2005, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act, and the Mitigation Monitoring Program developed to mitigate potentially significant environmental effects, and finds that the projects avoid, reduce or mitigate the possible significant environmental effects to a level of insignificance, and that there is no substantial evidence that the road restoration activities and habitat improvements in the Mattole River watershed may have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 Cal. Code Regulations Section 15382.
4. There is no evidence before the Conservancy that the road restoration activities and habitat improvements will have a potentially adverse effect on wildlife resources as defined under California Fish and Game Code 711.2.
5. The Conservancy has, on the basis of substantial evidence, rebutted the presumption of adverse effect contained in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 753.5(d) regarding the potential for adverse effect on wildlife resources as defined under California Fish and Game Code Section 711.2.
6. The Mattole Restoration Council is a private nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed authorization will enable the Mattole Restoration Council (“MRC”) to implement phase II of Mattole River watershed enhancement to address historic degradation of the coastal resources that support threatened and endangered salmonid species Coho and Chinook salmon, and Steelhead trout (Exhibit 1). Phase II continues the efforts begun in Phase I, authorized by the Conservancy on January 23, 2003, that included planning and outreach and identification of land for conservation. The project is funded in large part by the State Water Resources Control Board, the Department of Fish and Game (“DFG”), and the Wildlife Conservation Board. The proposed Conservancy authorization will augment the funds necessary to carry out that project. DFG has adopted a Mitigated Negative Declaration (Exhibit 2) for the work under the California Environmental Quality Act.

The Mattole Restoration Council is a member of the Mattole River and Range Partnership (MRRP), an unincorporated association of local nonprofit organizations including the Mattole Restoration Council (MRC) (the Conservancy’s grantee), Mattole Salmon Group (“MSG”), the Mattole Fire Safe Council, and Sanctuary Forest, Inc., working together to carry out the enhancement program for the watershed. The activities proposed under this authorization are outlined, in general terms, in the 2003 North Coast Watershed Assessment Program (NCWAP), a joint initiative of the California Resources Agency and CalEPA prepared in 2003 to address declining salmonid populations.

The Mattole River is included on an EPA list of impairments associated with excessive sediment and high temperatures, and has been designated a Critical Coastal Area by the California Coastal Commission as requiring special attention for protection of its coastal resources. The river supports three species of threatened and endangered anadromous salmonids, including Coho and Chinook salmon, and Steelhead trout. The Mattole River is listed as a habitat recovery unit in the Coho Salmon Recover Strategy (CA DFG, 2004) for maintaining critical habitat for Coho salmon.

The phase II enhancement activities focus on implementation of high-priority conservation projects. The bulk of the Phase II effort is directed toward the completion of the Upper Mattole River Watershed Rehabilitation Project, a road restoration project in the Mattole headwaters. The rehabilitation project area was chosen as a priority due to its location entirely within the southern sub-basin, or headwaters region, of the river. It will treat all accessible sediment sources in the entire 28 square mile Southern Sub-basin that were assessed during Phase I of the Program. Work will take place at over 300 sites on public, industrial and private lands, resulting in stabilization of approximately 69,000 cubic yards of sediment, stream bank stabilization at 48 sites, 90,000 trees planted to enhance riparian conditions, 12 in-stream salmon enhancement structures, creek clean-up at 2 sites, and post-project maintenance and monitoring. Further, the Upper Mattole River Watershed Rehabilitation Project will provide the Department of Fish and Game the data to evaluate basin-wide restoration effectiveness monitoring strategies.

The techniques employed in the proposed road restoration project will include removal of shrubs and trees on the work area, excavation of the road base and grading (where practicable) to contour to a natural slope, mulching the graded site with vegetative material obtained on-site during the work, post project monitoring and maintenance.

MATTOLE RIVER ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES - PHASE II

Other proposed projects under Phase II of the Watershed Enhancement program will include environmental review and permitting for the Watershed Management Plan, water conservation outreach to identify conservation opportunities, road sediment-load inventories, invasive plant removal and management, and fisheries monitoring for spawning and juvenile populations.

The MRC, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, has been involved in restoration efforts in the Mattole watershed for over 20 years, and has successfully completed Phase I of the Mattole River Watershed Enhancement Program funded by the Conservancy and other public agencies.

Site Description: The Mattole Basin encompasses approximately 300 square miles of the northern California Coast Range and crosses the Mendocino and Humboldt County boundary. The vast majority of the basin is within Humboldt County, with less than three percent of the Mattole's southernmost headwaters in Mendocino County. The main stem Mattole River is approximately 62 miles long, and receives water from over 74 tributary streams. There are approximately 545 perennial stream miles in the basin; the watershed drains into the Pacific Ocean just south of Cape Mendocino. Elevation within the basin ranges from sea level at the estuary to 4,088 feet at Kings Peak.

The current vegetation in the Mattole Basin is predominately forestland, with over 80 percent comprised of mixed conifer and hardwood forestland, hardwood forests, and coniferous forests. The timber resources in the watershed were heavily harvested following World War II, leaving reaches of exposed soil extremely vulnerable to erosion resulting in significant degradation to the health of the watershed and reduced water quality affecting the coastal resources of the system.

Fisheries resources of the Mattole Basin include fall-run Chinook salmon, Coho salmon, summer-run steelhead trout, and winter-run steelhead trout. The salmon and steelhead trout have been traditionally important as food and recreation resources to local residents and visitors. Anecdotal evidence suggests that anadromous salmonid runs in the Mattole Basin were large and have experienced a sharp decline since the mid 1950s.

Heavy timber harvesting in an area with high seismic activity, and an area that has experienced two 500-year flood events in 1955 and 1964, has caused significant changes to the watershed that dramatically worsened conditions for Chinook and Coho salmon. From 1960s estimates of annual returns of 10,000 Chinook and 4,000 Coho salmon, populations declined to scarcely 10 per cent of those numbers by 1990. Exhibits 3 and 4 portray their estimated historic ranges within the river system. The properties on which projects entailing improvements or construction such as road decommissioning may occur are located in the upper watershed and are largely owned by a local timber company and a local conservation group.

Project History: The Mattole River watershed has long been a place where residents have taken a hands-on approach to conservation. In the late 1970s local citizens began a long-term project to revive the Mattole River's declining salmon runs—initially working to directly address the decline through the use of small-scale fish propagation facilities called “hatch boxes.” This early work led residents to efforts to reduce stream sedimentation, protect old-growth forest, and educate neighbors about land management practices, and plant trees to improve riparian habitats.

Many successful restoration and conservation projects have been completed in the Mattole for the benefit of the native salmonids: acquisition of old-growth forests has protected nearly 75 percent of those identified in a 1988 mapping project; over 60 aquatic habitat improvement

MATTOLE RIVER ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES - PHASE II

projects have been completed; more than 24 miles of road bed restoration in the headwaters; and local landowners in several areas of the watershed are actively managing their lands cooperatively to improve watershed health. Many Conservancy activities have been instrumental in Mattole conservation. A 1995 study of the Mattole estuary, *The Dynamics of Recovery*, determined that the estuary, where all Chinook must over-summer, had been significantly modified by sediment input, and that restoration of historical estuary function would require controlling sediment inputs to the lower river. This led to the Mattole Good Roads, Clear Creeks Program, carried out by the Mattole Restoration Council and for which continued road surveys are proposed for this authorization. The Conservancy contributed to the 1997 acquisition by the Federal Bureau of Land Management of the old-growth Mill Creek Forest, protecting Mill Creek, the only Coho stream in the lower river, and in 2003 funded the acquisition by the North Coast Regional Land Trust of 319 acres of recovering commercial timberland in the Mattole headwaters, connecting with adjacent Department of Parks and Recreation lands.

Even with many successes toward recovery of the salmon, a larger and more comprehensive enhancement effort was deemed essential if the salmon are to recover. In 2000, the California Department of Resources funded the North Coast Watershed Assessment Program (NCWAP) for the Mattole which resulted in the NCWAP Synthesis Report. The NCWAP was a comprehensive evaluation of issues contributing to the decline in salmonid population and a presentation of recommendations to resolve those issues. The Synthesis Report, a joint initiative of the California Resources Agency and CalEPA prepared in 2003 to address declining salmonid populations, provided the impetus for the Mattole River Watershed Enhancement Program.

At its January 23, 2003, October 23, 2003 and January 29, 2004 board meetings the Conservancy authorized a total of \$750,000 for Phase I of the Mattole River Watershed Enhancement Program. The bulk of the work during Phase I involved development of the watershed management plan, which applies the NCWAP recommendations such as water flow conservation, sediment reduction, habitat restoration and land conservation, to specific locations within the watershed to create on-the-ground projects for areas in urgent need of corrective action. Other activities included erosion and sediment monitoring following road and habitat improvements; expanded community outreach and education for water conservation and the benefits of conservation easements; coordination of technical committees to advise the planning efforts; fish population and trend monitoring; conservation easement planning; and local capacity building.

The outreach and education efforts have resulted in landowner surveys to identify willing private participants for restoration projects; water conservation education which lead to the installation of water conservation equipment in homes and water storage tanks on properties; and restoration training for invasive plant removal, post road removal monitoring and slope stabilization. During Phase I, three conservation easements were identified and executed (donated to a land trust), and a large 4,000-acre tract of timber in the headwaters was identified for possible acquisition. Habitat improvement projects included road decommissioning-related activities such as winter monitoring and related repairs, and the construction of scour and shade pools in the Mattole River estuary to create protective summer habitat for salmonids.

MATTOLE RIVER ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES - PHASE II

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$433,000
Wildlife Conservation Board	893,000
State Water Resources Control Board	500,000
Department of Fish and Game	350,687
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	65,000
Bureau of Land Management	60,000
U.S. Forest Service	20,000
Total Project Cost	\$2,321,687

Conservancy funds will be used for a variety of habitat restoration and sediment reduction projects throughout the watershed such as road decommissioning, in-stream habitat restoration, riparian restoration, fisheries monitoring, and sediment load inventories. In addition to grants awarded from DFG, State Water Resources Control Board, and the Wildlife Conservation Board, MRC has received over \$88,000 in private donations.

The expected source for the Conservancy funds for this project is the fiscal year 2003-2004 appropriation from Proposition 40, the "California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002". Proposition 40 funds may be used for protecting coastal resources, improving water quality, and watershed protection programs in accordance with the Conservancy's enabling legislation (Public Resources Code Section 5096.650). This project is consistent with Proposition 40 in that it will protect the spawning resources for coastal salmonids by improving the water quality and habitat of the coastal watersheds. As Proposition 40 prefers, the project includes a commitment of matching funds (Public Resources Code §5096.651). As discussed below, the project is consistent with Chapter 5.5 of Division 21.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is undertaken under Chapter 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding integrated coastal and marine resource protection. The Conservancy may award grants for coastal watershed restoration project that meet any of the objectives specified in section 31220(b). Consistent with section 31220(b), the proposed project will (1) reduce sedimentation that degrades spawning and rearing habitat, thereby restoring fish habitat within coastal waters and coastal watersheds; (2) protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat within coastal waters and a coastal watershed by addressing restoration activities through a watershed-wide coordinated permit; (3) reduce threats to coastal and marine fish by enhancing habitat that will foster population successes; and (4) reduce unnatural erosion and sedimentation of coastal watersheds through decommission and removal of abandoned roads that are not maintained.

Consistent with section 31220(a), the Conservancy consulted with the State Water Resources Control Board in the development of this grant to ensure consistency with Chapter 3 (commencing with section 30915) of Division 20.4 of the Public Resources Code. As required by section 31220(c), the project is consistent with state and regional watershed planning, as

discussed in Section 2.3.3 of the *North Coast Regional Watershed Initiative Chapter* (North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Feb. 2005) of the *State Water Planning Strategic Plan* and described below under “Consistency with Local Watershed Management Plan/State Water Quality Control Plan.”

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with Goal 5, Objective B, the proposed project will lead to the protection of core coastal habitat through the preservation and protection of key spawning areas for Coho and Chinook salmon and Steelhead trout through road restoration and riparian corridor habitat improvement activities. Further, the proposed project will enable the acquisition of large tracts of habitat adjacent to protected properties to create large contiguous habitat corridors.

Consistent with Goal 6, Objective A, the proposed project will preserve and restore a coastal watershed and coastal resources critical to anadromous salmonids through the implementation of sediment reduction and habitat improvement projects. Salmonids utilize the Mattole River for spawning; juvenile salmonids utilize the systems as summer and winter habitat before returning to the coastal waters.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the “Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation” section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The communities in the Mattole River watershed strongly support the Mattole River Watershed Enhancement Program, the restoration activities taking place, and those planned, as evidenced by the high level of volunteerism and coordination of Phase I of the Enhancement Program. Further, state and local representatives support the Program. See Exhibit 4 for Letter of Support.
4. **Location:** The Mattole River watershed is located partly within and partly outside the coastal zone, in Mendocino and Humboldt Counties, approximately 200 miles north of San Francisco. The historic inappropriate land uses within the watershed have resulted in high rates sedimentation that have reduced marine and watershed spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids. The bulk of the project will occur in the headwaters region of the watershed and will focus on road decommission and removal to prevent an estimated 69,000 cubic yards of potential sediment from entering the river and further impacting the watershed health and coastal waters to which the river drains. The project will directly benefit the coastal resources

MATTOLE RIVER ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES - PHASE II

within the coastal zone, through improving the salmonid spawning and rearing habitat of the Coho and Chinook salmon and Steelhead trout in the river system.

5. **Need:** The Mattole River is rich in anadromous fish resources. However, because of years of incompatible land uses exacerbated by severe seismic and weather occurrences, those resources are in need of restoration. There has been, for nearly 30 years, a remarkable community effort to restore the fish and its habitat. With the completion of an assessment of the watershed there is a clear confirmation that the work must continue, if the Chinook and Coho salmon are to survive. The Conservancy is in a unique position to continue its involvement in the Mattole watershed and enable these efforts to go forward to realize the long-term goals of restoration.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The public-trust value of California's anadromous fish populations is epic and a resource that if lost in the Mattole would irreparably damage the economic base, as well as the way of life, of the Mattole. There is a long history of people coming from far and wide to fish the Mattole, which has experienced historic fish runs in the thousands. With the decline in those numbers, there has been a significant economic impact to the commercial and sport fishing industry. Implementing an enhancement program for the Mattole watershed will enable restoration activities; the restoration of habitat will increase salmon populations and benefit the overall economic condition of the state of California.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** Like all salmonid populations statewide, the salmonid populations of the Mattole River are in dire need of protection. Immediate action to reduce the threat to the salmonid habitat found in the Mattole and its coastal resources must for the efforts of the past 30 years for full salmon recovery to be realized.
9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
12. **Readiness:** The MRC and its local co-participants have secured funds for project implementation, and the project is ready to begin upon project authorization by the Conservancy. The expected duration of phase II of the Mattole Watershed Enhancement Program is approximately three years.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** This project will further the Conservancy's goals established under the watershed enhancement program to improve overall watershed health to increase viable salmonid habitat to result in increased sustainable salmonid populations in the Mattole River.
15. **Cooperation:** As discussed in the "Project Financing" section above, there are many organizations and agencies participating on the Mattole River and Range Enhancement Program to address the restoration needs in the watershed to improve the coastal resources of the Mattole River.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The Conservancy-funded activities will occur outside the coastal zone (consistent with Chapter 5.5 of Division 21) but will benefit coastal zone resources.

The Humboldt County Local Coastal Plan, South Coast Area Plan (LCP) discusses land use for this region of Humboldt County. Several sections of the LCP relevant to this project are identified below.

Section 3.41.A.1.g identifies as environmentally sensitive areas critical habitats for rare or endangered species on state or federal lists. The listed species Chinook, Coho salmon and steelhead trout inhabit and spawn in the Mattole River.

Section 3.41.E.2 identifies the Mattole River as a significant coastal stream, and incorporates by reference Section 30231 of the Coastal Act, regarding maintaining the biological productivity and the quality of coastal streams. Implementing this project will enable MRC to restore significant habitat for Chinook and Coho and steelhead salmon.

This project is also consistent with Section 3.41.E.6 which discusses natural drainage courses, stating that they “. . . shall be retained and protected from development which would . . . have a significant adverse effect on water quality or wildlife habitat.”

Chapter 3.1 of the Mendocino County General Plan (MCGP), Coastal Element defines as environmentally sensitive areas as “those areas in which plant or animal life or their habitats . . . are especially valuable because of their special nature or role in an ecosystem and which could be easily disturbed or degraded by human activities and development.” That chapter further lists environmentally sensitive habitat areas to include, among other areas, “anadromous fish streams.” Further, Section 3.1-10 of the MCGP states, “Areas where riparian vegetation exists are environmentally sensitive habitat area, and development within such areas shall be limited to only those uses which are dependent on the riparian resources.” The Mattole River watershed support habitats significant to the Chinook and Coho and steelhead salmon; this project will help restore the habitat and protect it from inappropriate development activities.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/ STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:

Section 2.3.3 of the North Coast Regional Watershed Initiative Chapter (North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board *Feb. 2005*) of the State Water Planning Strategic Plan, discusses the Mattole River Watershed and contamination from nonpoint sources such as timber activities, and recommends local and regional efforts to reduce the sources of sedimentation that adversely affect coho and chinook habitat.

The proposed project is consistent with the above plan in that it will reduce sediment deposition to the Mattole River, and protect the watershed from further degradation through habitat restoration activities to reverse former land use practices that reduced coastal and marine habitat.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed authorization involves improvements to the health and function of the Mattole River watershed to benefit its coastal resources critical to threatened and endangered salmonid species. Specifically, the proposed Conservancy project will include road erosion control projects in the Mattole headwaters; water conservation outreach; watershed management plan environmental review and permitting; additional sediment inventories; invasive plant removal and management; and fisheries monitoring for spawning and juvenile populations.

The techniques employed in the Upper Mattole Watershed Rehabilitation Project, as proposed, will include removal of shrubs and trees on the work area, excavation of the road base and grading to contour to a natural slope, mulching the graded site with vegetative material obtained on-site during the work, post project monitoring and maintenance.

MATTOLE RIVER ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES - PHASE II

On June 19, 2005, the California Department of Fish and Game (the “DFG”) adopted a Mitigated Negative Declaration (“MND,” Exhibit 2) for its “2005 Fishery Restoration Grants Program. . .” for which DFG is the CEQA lead agency, and filed a Notice of Determination. DFG’s fishery restoration grants program covers 14 counties including Humboldt, and the stated purpose is to restore salmon and steelhead habitat in coastal streams and watersheds. The DFG Restoration Program includes 111 habitat restoration items addressed in the MND, as well as 74 additional items that DFG finds to be exempt from CEQA, and ten items that DFG finds cannot adversely affect the environment.

Appendix A to the MND identifies categories of activities, and includes under “Exempt Projects”, (Table A-1), “Minor Action Items” (Table A-2), and “Major Action Items” (Table A-3) the items corresponding to the Conservancy’s proposed project. Appendix B to the MND constitutes mitigation measures and a CEQA monitoring and reporting program for the DFG Restoration Program.

The Mattole enhancement activities to which the Conservancy will contribute will occur in the portion of the upper Mattole watershed that lies within Humboldt County. These activities will include decommission/removal or upgrade of approximately 14 miles of road and the repair or removal of nearly 60 stream crossings in the southern sub-basin of the upper Mattole River watershed, to prevent potential delivery of more than 50,000 cubic yards of sediment to the river system, the removal of a fish passage barrier, conducting monitoring of road decommission/removal or upgrade sites, and riparian restoration activities involving tree planting in riparian zones. The Conservancy is acting as a responsible agency under CEQA with respect to these activities.

The proposed monitoring--the “Upper Mattole River Watershed Rehabilitation Project, Phase II Monitoring”--is listed in Exhibit A-1 to the MND (exempt items), and includes collection of stream channel metrics at 20 random stream reaches to provide trend data to determine effectiveness of road restoration/rehabilitation activities. In the MND, DFG states that these items, collectively, are exempt from CEQA under one or more of three sections of the CEQA Guidelines. Staff believes that the instant monitoring project is exempt under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations sections 15306 (information collection, research, experimental management and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource, and are conducted strictly for the information gathering purposes for actions or studies for future actions that have not been approved, adopted, or funded by an agency).

The proposed riparian planting, entitled the “Riparian Reforestation for Salmonid Recovery in the Mattole River Headwaters”, is listed in Exhibit A-2 to the MND (minor action items). It will entail planting native Douglas fir, Redwood, and hardwood species in the riparian zones of the South Fork Bear, Baker, Big Alder, Pipe, Campbell, Yew, Green, and Lost River Creeks, as well as on 66 decommissioned stream crossing within the southern sub-basin of the Mattole River for the purposes of accelerating canopy closer and cover to enhance riparian shade and streambank stability for enhanced salmonid survival. The MND describes how typical minor actions of this kind are implemented, with reference to the California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual. Heavy equipment will not be used; work will be done with hand tools. Sites are accessible by existing roads, and staging activities will be implemented in a manner that minimizes disturbance to the stream banks. DFG concludes that the minor action items have no potential for causing significant environmental impacts.

MATTOLE RIVER ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES - PHASE II

The statements of work (collectively attached to the MND as “Exhibit A”) for the proposed road decommission/removal or upgrade and fish passage improvement, entitled “Bear Creek Road Upgrades” and “Upper Mattole Coho Recovery Project” (both involve road decommission/removal or upgrade), are listed in Exhibit A-3 to the MND (major items). The scope entails, respectively, the decommission/removal or upgrade of 3.5 and 10 miles of road, and the removal or repair of stream crossings to reduce sediment load or potential future failure. Additionally, the latter project includes the modification of a partial fish passage barrier and the placement of large woody debris to create a bank stabilizing structure to reduce erosion. The MND discusses potential environmental impacts of less-than-significant impact and less-than-significant-with-mitigation-incorporated for these types of projects. Less-than-significant-with-mitigation incorporated impacts for these types of projects pertain to biological resources, cultural resources, and noise. With respect to biological resources, potential impacts either directly or through habitat modification were identified. However, the road and fish-passage work will not have a significant adverse effect because they have been mitigated both generally through the MND and specifically through requirements in the particular statements of work. For example, the permissible work window will be constrained to avoid nesting or breeding seasons of birds and terrestrial animals, site-access points will be minimized, and other precautionary measures will be taken to avoid spreading of invasive species, trash, hazardous materials such as equipment lubricants, etc. Work is required to be performed in accordance with additional documents, including the California Salmonid Stream Restoration Manual and the Handbook for Forest and Ranch Roads.

With respect to cultural resources, the MND provides for sites with the potential to be impacted to be surveyed, prior to any ground disturbing activities, and appropriate mitigation measures including fencing, on site monitoring during site work, or redesign of project approach to be implemented.

With respect to noise, potential problems were identified in the areas of temporary or periodic increases in ambient noise to levels in excess of standards established in local plans or ordinances or applicable standards of other agencies, and occasional generation of levels equal to or in excess of 85 decibels. The MND provides for the effects of noise to be mitigated by use by project workers of adequate hearing protection when operating or working near noisy equipment.

Finally, the mitigated effects of road decommissioning or upgrade in the upper Mattole River watershed will not contribute to adverse environmental impacts that are cumulatively significant. In fact, by improving habitat through control of historic sedimentation the project, and any similar future projects, there will be cumulative benefits to the Mattole River and the Mattole River watershed.

With the changes and mitigations, DFG concluded, and staff believes, that the potentially significant effects have been reduced to a level of insignificance. The required mitigations will be monitored through DFG’s mitigation, monitoring, and reporting program, consistent with Public Resources Code Section 21081.6. Specifically, the reporting program requires that DFG ensure that all of the mitigation measures outlined in the MND are implemented, and prepare and submit a report on the progress of those measures to the National Marine Fisheries Service annually for the duration of the project.

Activities proposed under this authorization but not directly addressed in the DFG MND include water conservation outreach; environmental review and permitting for the Watershed

MATTOLE RIVER ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES - PHASE II

Management Plan recommendations; additional sediment inventories; and fisheries monitoring for spawning and juvenile populations. As described above, these would not involve construction, disturbance of species of concern, or disturbances to habitat or the environment. Water conservation outreach is not a project for the purposes of CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15378. The environmental review and permitting activities, sediment inventories, and fisheries monitoring activities are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 (information collection, research, resource evaluation).

Invasive plant removal and management will involve hand removal of invasive plants within the watershed of tributaries to the Mattole River, for the purposes of removing competition with native plants. Promoting growth of native plants in riparian corridors will improve wildlife habitat by restoring a natural setting. This activity is categorically exempt from CEQA under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15304 (minor alterations to land, water, or vegetation).

Staff therefore recommends that the Conservancy find that the proposed authorization, as mitigated, will not have a significant effect on the environment. Staff further recommends that the Conservancy find that there is no evidence that the proposed habitat improvement activities will have an adverse effect, as described in 14 Cal. Code of Regulations section 753.5(d), on wildlife, defined in California Fish and Game Code section 711.2.

Upon approval, staff will file appropriate CEQA notices.